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The Strategic Environment of 2010

by Mort Rolleston

Background

The strategic environment that will exist in the year 2010 will have relevance to the environmental, economic, and security interests of the United States. Identifying the most likely drivers and scenarios that will shape that strategic environment, and the best U.S. policies to address them, was the object of the "Future Visions 2010 Conference," a series of eight, day-long seminars sponsored by the National Intelligence Council in cooperation with National Defense University. Each seminar, with its participating scholars, journalists, and government officials, focused on a specific region of the world, or on global trends overall. The key points of the conference follow.

Global Drivers Through 2010

The global drivers that are likely to affect the world's strategic environment through 2010 can be separated into several broad categories: (1) environmental; (2) technological, and (3) political.

Environmental Drivers: The world's population, especially in the developing countries, continues its rapid growth, further straining limited resources. Various side effects of population growth—such as deforestation, soil erosion caused by poor land conservation, and pollution—are placing great stress on the global environmental systems that support human life. If economic development and food and energy supplies cannot keep pace, widespread discontent and political instability could erupt into conflict. However, economic development does not always imply regional peace. Aggressive states can use such prosperity to impose their will on others.

Technological Drivers: The spread of modern telecommunications (especially the internet) throughout the world will continue to generate increased awareness among the world's people. In turn, this will pressure governments to improve their performance, motivate many of the poor to migrate to better places, generate more cultural conflicts, and contribute to the effectiveness of non-state actors.

In the United States, the so-called "Revolution in Military Affairs" (RMA) will be well underway by 2010. It is dependent on two technological developments: precision guided munitions (PGMs) and the integration of information technology into a "system of systems" that will significantly increase the capability to identify targets and relay that information in near-real-time to friendly forces. There is also a "counter RMA" occurring among potential U.S. adversaries. Less developed states have access to components and sub-systems that may enable them to exploit vulnerabilities they perceive in American logistical structures and information systems in a theater of operations. Both the RMA and its counterpart will make it extremely difficult to wage a Persian Gulf-style war by 2010, because major

weapons platforms will become more vulnerable. The states that prevail will be those that develop countermeasures to protect their offensive forces.

Political Drivers: While nation states will continue to exist in 2010 as the basic framework for global commerce and politics, many may disintegrate into smaller ethnically-based units or combine into larger regional organizations such as the European Union (EU). There are different reasons for these trends: (1) some states, especially in Africa, have become dysfunctional and are collapsing internally; (2) many states face succession problems; and (3) some states are increasingly unable to cope with the rise of non-state actors such as international organizations, transnational organizations (corporations, human rights groups, crime syndicates, terrorists, etc.), sub-state groups, and individuals. One result has been the rise of communal conflicts in determining state control.

Regional Trends

East Asia: The key drivers that will shape this region's security are China, Korean reunification, and continued U.S. presence in the region. Chinese regional hegemony is not inevitable as it faces the difficult task of promoting economic growth and openness without jeopardizing state political control. However, China will remain a major regional influence. For example, despite the projected economic growth of East Asia into the foreseeable future, most smaller nations in the region will be at a great disadvantage once China has developed economically and will likely be forced to scramble for niche markets. In addition, China may become the center of regional trans-national problems (crime, illegal migration, pollution, spread of disease, etc.). Sino-Japanese relations may improve as the leadership of both nations transition to the post-World War II generation.

Korea will probably be reunified by 2010, but how this happens will be especially important for the region. North Korea's rapid deterioration, coupled with its widening economic gap with the South, rising nationalism in the South, and increasing concern in Seoul over the U.S.-North Korean dialogue, are all making a "soft landing" for Pyongyang less likely.

The United States and its relationship with its regional allies, especially Japan, will continue to be the most important driver shaping this region through 2010. Its continued presence is necessary to maintain regional stability. However, it will realistically have to pursue its interests with less focus on military power and more on mutual economic and diplomatic interests.

Middle East: Given the fact that oil will likely remain the energy of choice through this period and the U.S. security commitments to Israel, the stability of the oil-rich Persian Gulf will remain a vital U.S. interest through 2010. Increasing regional political instability, caused by the following factors, could erupt into a crisis drawing American involvement.

- The region's stagnant economies are not creating enough jobs to employ the rapidly exploding population, fueling widespread dissatisfaction with the current leadership that is readily exploited by radical dissidents. The region's rapid urbanization, scarce water supplies, below standard education levels, the lack of economic diversification beyond oil, and cultural impacts on labor productivity exacerbate current economic woes.
- Many regional leaders are aging, and the states they govern generally have not made clear provisions for an orderly transition of power.
- Most states, fearing the loss of their mono-poly on power and the ability to manipulate resources,

have halted political and economic liberalization.

- Most states in the region are wary of collective security arrangements. It is likely that these states will continue to promote active interstate competition over cooperation.

In response, the United States should: (1) balance the *external risk* from Iraq and the *internal risk* to Saudi Arabia when considering its policy, (2) reduce its dependence on Saudi Arabia as the primary host for U.S. forces, (3) minimize its visibility in the region, and, (4) accept the reality that it has a minimal ability to influence domestic Iranian politics.

Europe: By 2010, Europe is likely to become more integrated as NATO and the EU try to expand into Central Europe and the Baltics. However, it is conceivable that Europe could fragment along national lines, especially if economic growth rates—which are being encumbered by rising entitlement spending—remain below two percent. A key policy challenge will be how to prevent states who are not admitted to the EU in the first wave from reverting to statist policies. Germany's influence is increasing, but fears of future German regional hegemony are probably exaggerated. The possibility of conflicts involving Greece, Turkey, and/or nationalist rivalries in the Balkans and the rise of militant, fundamentalist Islam in the Mediterranean region will continue through 2010. However, events in Russia and its relationship with both the United States and its European neighbors will remain the most important driver shaping Europe's perception of its own security.

The United States will probably face a more united and confident Europe through 2010 that may not agree with it on many issues. Europe will be consumed with its internal affairs into the foreseeable future and may not be a willing ally for a global superpower such as the United States. How Europe manages these differences with the United States will be a key driver of its future strategic environment. Despite these trends, it is in Washington's interests for Europe to be strong, prosperous and united rather than weak and divided. Therefore, the United States should encourage Europe's integration. Continued U.S. involvement in NATO is essential to the alliance's future as it will not be attractive to new members without U.S. participation and new members are essential for its survival.

Russia: Russia remains important to U.S. interests in Europe and, increasingly, in Asia. Because its government will continue to be too fragile to make the necessary hard choices, economic hardship and domestic instability is likely to continue. While it would be extremely difficult for the Kremlin to revert to an authoritarian regime in an era of instant communications, this same technology will strengthen regional governments at Moscow's expense and increase the potential for internal division. While it is in Russia's best economic interests to become a commodities exporter, for reasons of prestige and mistrust of Western intentions and markets, it will likely promote a relatively closed economy during this transition and thus delay its economic recovery.

The United States should continue to actively promote stability in Russia to allow a market economy and democracy to grow and take hold. In turn, this will allow the necessary underpinnings of law, regulation, and financial systems to evolve to institutionalize a stable political and economic environment.

South Asia: Four major issues will determine the strategic outlook of this region through 2010:

- Economic growth rates in India.
- Social and political developments among the various religious, language, tribal and caste groups in India.

- The future stability of Pakistan as a single, unified, civilian-controlled, economically stable, non-fundamentalist nation state.
- Nuclear proliferation in India, Pakistan and neighboring China.

Despite its limited influence in the region, the United States should: (1) take a more active interest in mitigating the Indo-Pakistan dispute; (2) take steps to remain neutral in the dispute between China and India; and (3) respond more directly to any overture by India to find common ground and develop an amiable relationship with the United States.

Latin America: If current trends of development, democracy, economic integration, declining interstate conflict, and manageable population growth continue, Latin America will be a good news story through 2010. However, the transnational problems of drugs and illegal immigration will remain. The influence of regional non-state actors such as non-government organizations (NGOs), international financial institutions, businesses, drug cartels and terrorist groups is rapidly growing. The United States should:

- continue to facilitate trade liberalization both within the region and with the United States despite the domestic political costs.
- adopt a non-threatening, positive type of engagement that is sensitive to the feelings and aspirations of Latin Americans.
- encourage Mexico to adopt policies that make continued progress towards democracy and economic growth.
- focus on strong relations with Brazil and Mexico (and even be willing to cede a certain amount of regional leadership to both).
- check the rise of Asian and European influence by paying consistent attention to the region rather than sporadically reacting to major crises.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Instability will continue in Africa and may worsen by 2010 due to poor economic performance, ineffective political leadership, and ethnic/tribal conflict. The main obstacle to regional economic growth will remain the difficulty of attracting foreign capital due to small markets, underdeveloped infrastructure, poor labor productivity and education, and political instability. Africa's political future will be widely dependent on the personalities of national leaders because the political processes of most African nations have yet to be institutionalized. Usually, this is detrimental because most leaders pursue policies designed to maintain power with little consideration of how they affect the state's future. A further complication is that various non-state forces are steadily increasing their ability to arm themselves and challenge states in various parts of Africa. The Organization of African Unity is reevaluating its traditional stand on maintaining colonial-era political boundaries, which could facilitate the merging of weak states with successful neighboring states. Finally, both radical Islamists and China are likely to play increasing roles in Africa through 2010.

The optimum time for the international community to affect this area is between now and 2010. American policy should use well-designed foreign aid programs, as well as carefully targeted and conditioned debt relief, to help Africa find solutions to its problems. This would require a reversal in the current trend of foreign aid reductions, which severely impedes U.S. ability to positively influence the

region.

The United States and Its Role in the World

Although the United States will almost certainly remain the lone superpower in 2010, Washington's global influence will likely decline compared to today. U.S. forces are not adequately preparing to cope with a security environment that is becoming more dominated by communal conflicts and operations-other-than-war. In addition, its willingness to participate in future conflicts is becoming more constrained by the American political sensitivity to casualties in operations not widely viewed as in Washington's best interests. Finally, the United States appears to be leaning more towards unilateralism, rather than multilateralism, in its participation in global events.

This paper summarizes the key points made by the participants of "Future Visions 2010 Conference," a series of eight, day-long seminars sponsored by the National Intelligence Council in cooperation with National Defense University. Mort Rolleston is a Research Assistant for the Defense Strategy Team of INSS. For more information contact Captain Michael Martus at (202) 685-2369, by fax at (202) 685-3972, or by e-mail at martusm@ndu.edu.

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